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FORMATION OF 'KAZAKHSTANI' NATION: FOCUSING ON THE ACTIVITIES OF ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE OF KAZAKHSTAN¹

Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in unfavorable demographic situation, which had high potential to devolve into an ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, currently Kazakhstan is preserving social stability without any ethnic conflicts. How has Kazakhstan succeeded in achieving effective ethnic unification in the process of nation building? The article examines the activities of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan – the institution that is not established in other multi-ethnic states.

Keywords: nation building of Kazakhstan, Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstani nation, civil society.

Аңдатпа

Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейін Қазақстанда этностық қақтығысқа ұласу әлеуеті жоғары, жағымсыз, күрделі демографиялық ахуал қалыптасқан болатын. Бірақ, соған қарамастан қазіргі таңда Қазақстанда ешбір этникалық қақтығыстарсыз әлеуметтік тұрақтылық сақталып отыр. Қазақстан тарапы өзінің ұлттық құрылыс үдерісінде ұтымды этникалық унификацияға қалайша қол жеткізді? Мақала барысында өзге көпұлтты мемлекеттерде жоқ Қазақстан халқы Ассамблеясының қызметі қарастырылады.

Тірек сөздер: Қазақстандағы ұлт құрылысы, Қазақстан халқы Ассамблеясы, қазақстандық ұлт, азаматтық қоғам.

Аннотация

После распада Советского Союза в Казахстане сложилась неблагоприятная демографическая ситуация, которая имела большой потенциал перерастания в этнический конфликт. Несмотря на это, на сегодняшний день в Казахстане сохраняется социальная стабильность без каких-либо этнических конфликтов. Как же удалось Казахстану достичь успешной этнической унификации в процессе национального строительства? Статья рассматривает деятельность Ассамблеи народа Казахстана, являющейся институтом, которого нет в других многонациональных государствах.

Ключевые слова: национальное строительство Казахстана, Ассамблея народа Казахстана, казахстанская нация, гражданское общество.

I. Introduction

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, five republics in Central Asia appeared as new countries. These countries faced different geographical, political, and economic problems after gaining independence, but all five were transformed into multiethnic and multicultural societies through the Russian Empire and the Soviet periods. Therefore, the issue of ethnicity was directly related to the foundation and development of their country, and became a crucial factor that had a hold over the future of the country.

According to the data from 1993, major ethnic groups in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan comprised about half or less than half of the population. In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, major ethnic groups were barely the majority. Under these demographical circumstances, how did the fate of the above five countries turn out?

Since their independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan suffered from continuous ethnic conflicts and civil wars, and their existence as countries were threatened. On the other hand, Kazakhstan, where non-titular nation outnumbered titular nation, seems to have maintained a relatively peaceful society, made up of about 130 different ethnic groups. Inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan today present a very different picture from the dire predictions [1] of two decades ago. One certain fact is that the ethno-demographic circumstances in Kazakhstan after independence were not necessarily stable or hopeful compared to other Central Asian countries.

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If anything, the situation was more abject. Yet despite that how were they able to achieve a relatively successful ethnic unification? This research stemmed from this question.

As other Soviet Union's former republics, Kazakhstan was confronted with the creation of new civic national discourses in the absence of the overriding economic and political ideologies, which socialism had provided for the Soviet civic nation. [2] Immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhs, as the titular or eponymous nationality, saw themselves as the sole indigenous nation of the sovereign republic in independent Kazakhstan. [3] However, at the same time, because of the unfavorable demographic situation and language issues stemmed from the Russian Empire and Soviet era, it was necessary for them to create a mechanism that encompasses all existing ethnic minorities as well after the independence. Accordingly, while they implemented a nation-building based on ethnic notion—"Kazakhification," Kazakhstan made attempts to carry on a nation-building process based on civic notion.

In this context, in 1995, a institution was created in Kazakhstan which is called Assembly of People of Kazakhstan(APK). The APK has been receiving positive reviews from the international society since their establishment. For instance, in 2002, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General at the time, visited Kazakhstan. He said in his speech that "Kazakhstan may serve as example of a peaceful multiethnic country where ethnic diversity is a blessing, but not the curses," and described the APK as an institution that can be "an example of international consent and stable development for other countries. Ban Ki-moon, the current UN Secretary General, visited Kazakhstan in 2010 as well, and acknowledged the importance of the APK by stating, "Friendship is fundamental for peace, prosperity and security. It is based on the values of respect and tolerance. These are the principles of the United Nations, and they are the principles of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. I commend President Nazarbayev for establishing this Assembly." Both former and the current UN secretary generals highly regarded the efforts of the APK for emphasizing the sense of equality and achieving multi-ethnic integration and balance. Therefore, based on the positive reviews from international societies, this paper focuses on the activities of Assembly of People of Kazakhstan(APK) during the formation of a Kazakhstani nation.

The APK carries significant implications and it is also the axis of the realization of Kazakhstan government's policy regarding multi-ethnicity. Therefore, APK will be a suitable research subject that allows a look into the process of formation of the Kazakhstani nation directly and indirectly. By examining the resulting policies, their influence on the domestic society and the direction of their progress, this research will provide a suitable visual framework to understand and envisage present Kazakhstan and its future.

Establishment and Main Purpose of the APK

With the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, all ethnic groups in each republic lost their strong sense of belonging as Soviet citizens, which had been deeply rooted in their minds. Consequently, Central Asian countries looked for a new identity that would bind them together. In order to forge a new national identity, political elites in all five Central Asian countries decided to implement a nation-building policy based on ethnicity, since ethnic nationalism was a convenient and promising strategy, capable of providing a sense of stability by uniting majority groups around the common and powerful link of ethnicity. [4] Immediately after independence from the Soviet system, Kazakhstan had to present the legitimacy of their autonomy by putting forward ethno-national representativeness as other Central Asian countries have done. [5] However, at the same time, they needed to consider the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of the country's population. The demographic situation in Kazakhstan, which inherited the complex conditions of multi-ethnic society formed during Russian Empire and the Soviet period, was mainly composed of Russians and Kazakhs. Overall, in the political, economic, and social aspects, Kazakhstan was divided into two different groups, Kazakhs and Russian-speaking nations. Therefore, the government of Kazakhstan could not ignore their existence, and understood that extreme policies with emphasis on ethnicity were a sensitive issue that could threaten the stability of the county. As

a result, the ideology for independent Kazakhstan has been and is framed by a double process: nationalization in favor of the members of the titular nation (Kazakhification process) and the promotion of a civic Kazakhstani identity (Kazakhstani process). [6]

Table 2-1. The Kazakh Population in Kazakhstan, 1897 to 1992.

Year	Thousands	Percentage of Total Population
1897	3,000	79.8
1926	3,713	57.1 (or 58.2)
1939	2,640	38.2
1959	2,755	30.0
1970	4,234	32.6
1979	5,289	36.0
1989	6,531	39.7
1992	7,297	43.2

Source: Anatoly M. Khazanov, "Ethnic Strife in Contemporary Kazakhstan," *The National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, 1994.

In 1991, the year of their independence, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) considered the multi-ethnic conditions in Kazakhstan and recommended the establishment of an institution to represent diverse ethnicities present in the Kazakhstan. During this time, the government of Kazakhstan also has to display their volition within the Kazakhstan territory to guarantee the rights and freedom of ethnic minorities, who have the potential to separate and declare independence. Therefore, there was a need for a practical mechanism to manage inter-ethnic relation and strengthen social stability in order to prevent this type of ethnic problems that could hinder the unification of the country.

For the above reasons, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan officially suggested the creating of the APK at the first Forum of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, held in 1992 to commemorate the first anniversary of independence for Kazakhstan. Afterwards, in March 1995, the "Assembly of People of Kazakhstan" was established by a presidential decree as a presidential consultative body. The first official meeting place in order to express different nationalities' opinions and concerns about how to achieve national harmony and unity was created in Kazakhstan. The APK is a unique institution in Kazakhstan that is rarely found in other multiethnic countries. It was instituted to strengthen the inter-ethnic and inter-confessional communications, further advance inter-ethnic relation to a higher level based on these experiences, and develop solutions to inter-ethnic issues in Kazakhstan's own way. According to the Kazakhstan constitution, the APK represents the social and political lives of various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan with five goals and aims: 1. Promotion of interethnic and interreligious harmony and keeping social stability; 2. Making proposals for public policies that promote the development of friendly relations between the nationalities living in Kazakhstan and the promotion of their spiritual and cultural revival and development based on the principle of equality; 3. The formation of political culture, which is based on civilized and democratic norms; 4. Ensuring the diverse national interests in the state's national policy; and 5. Search for a compromised solution for social contradictions. [7] In sum, the purpose of APK was to perform tasks in order to achieve harmony of about 130 ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan and to create a united society, through which a stable development of the country can be promoted.

Analysis of APK Activities

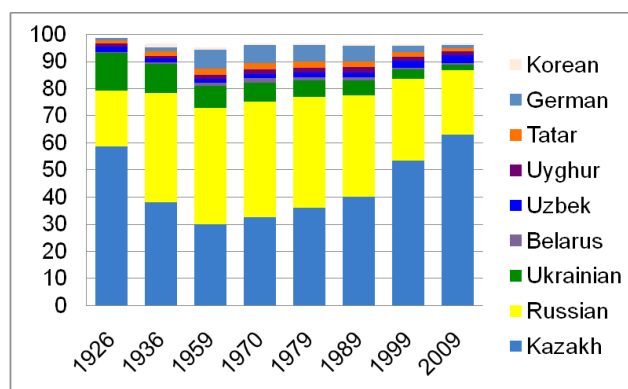
Kazakhstan was faced with an unexpected difficulty of having to simultaneously pursue "Kazakhification" process and "Kazakhstani" process in complex ethnic circumstances after independence. The importance of APK has changed according to their government's ethnic

policies, and it could be divided into following two periods; the first period is from 1995-1999, which “Kazakhification” is stressed, and the second period is from 2000 to this present day (2015), in which the “Kazakhstani” process is emphasized.

- 1995–1999, the Period of “Kazakhification” Process

Since its independence from the Soviet Union to 1999, Kazakhstan mainly implemented ethnic policies focusing on “Kazakhification.” Just like other Central Asian countries that became new countries, Kazakhstan attempted to escape from the Soviet influence and build a new country with the titular nation—the Kazakhs—at the center. From the demographic aspect, Slavic nation, which was a non-titular nation, still occupied a leading position in sectors of the country overall. However, due to the Kazakhification process after independence, non-Kazakhs, majority of who was Slavs, began to gradually move out of the territory of Kazakhstan, and at the same time, the high birth rate for Kazakhs as well as the repatriation program for the Kazakhs living abroad allowed the percentage of the Kazakh population to increase. Based on this socio-demographic change, the government of Kazakhstan accelerated the Kazakhification process at this time.

Figure 4-1. Major Nationalities in Kazakhstan from 1926 to 2009
(in percentage)



Source: Reframed based on The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Demoscope.ru.

These state-level policies focusing on the titular nation—the Kazakhs—appear in the changed section of the preamble of the constitution. The preamble of the constitution from 1993 begins in somewhat civic tone with “We, the people of Kazakhstan, as an inseparable part of the world community, take the unshakable Kazakh statehood into our consciousness [...]” [5] On the other hand, the preamble of the constitution that has been effective since 1995 begins with “We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh land, considering ourselves a peace-loving and civil society, [...]” which indicates an the ethnicity-based concept of territoriality. Compared to the preamble from 1993, the latter noticeably emphasizes the Kazakh territory and highlights the existence of the Kazakhs. In addition, Russian or Russified names of cities, streets, and republic institutions were discarded in favor of the Kazakh form and the Kazakh language achieved the status of a state language in the first constitution of Kazakhstan. This process shows that the Kazakhstan government tried to refashion its image of the state by decrying Soviet times. [8]

Amidst Kazakhification, the APK played an inconspicuous role from the political perspective. The APK was prominent mainly in the socio-cultural aspects, and after independence, the APK officially classified the residents of Kazakhstan into about 130 ethnic groups and focused on supporting these groups to safely settle down in the country. As explained previously, the function of the APK in its inception was to create an environment to enable the revival and development of the languages and traditional cultures of diverse ethnic groups in Kazakhstan by collaborating with national cultural centers, such as German gymnasium, Ukrainian gymnasium, Armenian Center “Van,” Chechen-Ingush Center “Tan,” Chinese Cultural Center, Jewish Center “Alef,” etc., in order

to tolerance among different ethnic groups and social agreement. Therefore, regional APKs and national cultural centers, supported by the state level of APK, aided in reviving the languages of various ethnic groups and cultural activities, such as preserving traditional dances and songs. The APK not only supported each ethnic group but also actively sought to realize ethnic harmony. The APK hosted festivals to promote friendly inter-ethnic relations and played a leading role in organizing various academic conferences and projects related to ethnic unification. In addition, the APK was active not only domestically but internationally as well. For example, the APK mutually collaborated with various countries, civic organizations and international organizations to resolve inter-ethnic problems. They supported seminars, conferences, and other academic activities related to the problems of ethnic relation, and provided publications and newsletters for the mass. Additionally, the APK supported Kazakh diasporas to continue developing their mother-tongue and traditional culture, and became the middleman in forming and strengthening diaspora's relationship with Kazakhstan, or their historical motherland. Through the APK's socio-cultural activities, newspapers and magazines in 15 different ethnic languages were published in Kazakhstan, radio programs are aired in eight different languages, and TV shows in seven languages. Regarding education, there are 88 schools operating in Uzbek, Tajik, Uighur, and Ukrainian languages. In 108 schools, 22 different ethnic language classes are offered. Moreover, 195 ethnic educational organizations and Sunday language schools were established so that not only students but also adults can learn 30 different ethnic languages including the state language—Kazakh. There are theaters operating in Kazakh and Russian, as well as four different ethnic languages—Uzbek, Uighur, Korean, and German. Besides these, books written in each ethnic language are published every year as well.

As a result, the APK's early activities were helpful for quelling potential for inter-ethnic conflicts effectively in socio-cultural level in this period.

-2000–2015, the Period of “Kazakhstani” Process

Early Kazakhstan's ethnic policies focused on the movement to promote “Kazakhification”, considering the non-Kazakh population yet centering on the Kazakhs, in order to strengthen the degraded status of ethnic Kazakhs during the Soviet period. On the other hand, since the 2000s, ethnic policies with an emphasis on civic Kazakhstani identity began to surface. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan first introduced the concept of “Kazakhstani” in his speech about the strategy program for Kazakhstan in 1997 called “Kazakhstan 2030.” [5] It is being used as a main concept for the formation of unified national identity-“Kazakhstani nation”, including all ethnic groups regardless of their ethnicities like citizenship. Beginning with the President Nazarbayev's introducing the concept of “Kazakhstani” in 1997, ethnic policies that lay an emphasis on inter-ethnic characteristics began to be promoted in civic nation-building process. In this inter-ethnic trend, the APK began to carry out and promote its activities more vigorously.

The changes began to take shape when the new Regulation on the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan was approved in April, 2002. As a strategy for the APK from 2002 through 2011, this new Regulation emphasized on the APK's role for formation of a civic 'Kazakhstani' nation. While the state language—Kazakh—and the culture of the Kazakh nation played a pivotal role in the new regulation, it officially proposes the consolidation of all ethnic groups based on Kazakhstani patriotism and the formation of the “Kazakhstani identity.” [9] The Kazakhstan authorities have suggested that the Kazakh language and culture must play a primary role in order to establish a civic nation of Kazakhstan through this new regulation. This proposal actually emphasized ethnic factors rather than civic ones in action, as it highlights the language and culture of the titular nation. Consequently, on the surface, the new regulation appears to assert the “Kazakhstani” concept, which is a civic factor. However, in the actual implementation and operation, ethnic factors, the Kazakh language and culture, play a major role, and these two concepts are simultaneously employed.

Another representative example that shows the APK's activities is the “Doctrine of the National Unity of Kazakhstan (Қазақстанның ел бірлігі доктринасы). The Doctrine was proposed by the president in October 2008 at the 14th session of the APK, drafted by the APK committee, and announced through the media and the press. The aim of the Doctrine is to instill national unity by

acknowledging that every Kazakhstani citizen shares a unique value system. It reflects the common ideals that consolidate all citizens of Kazakhstan into a single state, regardless of one's ethnic heritage, religion, or social class. [10] It establishes an equation between the state and the nation [6] under the government's supposition that the interethnic concord have been well established in Kazakhstan. Unlike the government's supposition, however, Kazakh nationalists openly disapproved of passing the Doctrine by going on hunger strikes after the Doctrine had been announced by mass. They claimed that the Doctrine underestimates the role of the Kazakh language and culture and opposed it. According to them, the current Kazakhstan society is still not mature enough to form a Kazakhstani nation. They also asserted that the civic nation of Kazakhstan should not be formed in the current Kazakhstan society, which is based on the Russian language and culture, and rather must be established only based on the identity of titular nation with Kazakh language and culture. As a result, the government directly corresponded with the Kazakh nationalists before approving the Doctrine and modified its direction to put more emphasis on the Kazakh language and culture in the nation-building process, reflecting the opinions of the nationalists. The Doctrine was finally passed at the 15th session of the APK in 2010. It contains the following three main principles: "One country, one destiny," "Various origins, equal opportunities," and "Development of a national spirit" [10]. Also it concludes with a focus on developing the Kazakh language as a priority for national unity, which Kazakh nationalists strongly asserted. The last part of the Doctrine also states that it is possible for the country to achieve economic growth, social progress, and democratic development only under social unity, illustrating the main purpose of the Doctrine in a simple manner.

The drafting process and the approval of the Doctrine allow a third party to foresee the direction of the nation building put forth by the Kazakhstan government. As it directly appears in the Doctrine, the APK's activities are clearly focused on unifying various ethnic groups into one group of citizens. However, it once again illustrates that the process needs to be Kazakh-centric, in other words, centered on the Kazakh language and culture. Just like the new Regulation of the APK in 2002, using both the elements of ethnic nation (Kazakhification) and civic nation (Kazakhstani) in the Doctrine shows that the ethnic policy of Kazakhstan will not simply aim to build a pure means of civic nation.

Since The Doctrine of National Unity was passed, the APK has been active in developing the Kazakh language and culture. President Nazarbayev stated that the APK should lead the national progress of mastering the official language of the country. [11] An example of the realization of this statement is "Tildaryn." The establishment of "Tildaryn" was one of the prominent activities of the APK. It was created as a methodic center of innovative technologies for language training in 2011, supported by the social fund under APK. Also, the center has been operated under the sponsorship of the sovereign wealth fund "Samruk Kazyna" and the Development Bank of Kazakhstan. This showed that the government recognizes the language center as an important institution necessary in realizing their goal through the nation-building process.

Even though the history of the center is short, they have been quite active. For example, "Tildaryn" launched a project called "Integration of language, culture, customs and traditions." This project was put into effect from June 15 to September 6, 2012 in Turkey. According to the director of the center, Meruert Kabyshukurovna, the main objective of the project is to increase functional activity of the state language, strengthen inter-ethnic harmony, promote ideas of Kazakhstani patriotism, Kazakhstan's model of tolerance, and social harmony in the international area. With these objectives, they provide language course programs to popularize state language—Kazakh—by using effective methods. In order to popularize the use of the Kazakh language, they provide Kazakh language lessons, as well as television and radio programs, and mobile versions of training programs for PCs and tablets. In addition, every language program intertwined the aspect of regional studies, national and cultural peculiarities of Kazakh nation.

It may be too early to assess the activities of "Tildaryn" due to its short history. However, it is clear from several interviews of the president and the head of the center and their official website that their purpose and activities are aimed at educating all Kazakhstan citizens in the Kazakh

language, history, and culture. This is also in accord with the arguments put forth by the Kazakh nationalists in the process of approving the Doctrine. Ultimately, Tildaryn's role is to establish the foundation based on the Kazakh language and culture so that the formation of Kazakhstani nation the government has assumed can take place. These types of APK activities in cooperation with Tildaryn emphasize the Kazakh ethnicity, and thus reveal characteristics of an ethnic concept.

Consequently, in this period, the characteristic of activities of APK is somewhat ambiguous between civic and ethnic concept. In other words, they always put a room for changes according to the situation and soothe the possible discontents among various ethnic groups.

Conclusion

In order to unify about 130 ethnic groups into one community of Kazakhstan and to realize the formation of a civic "Kazakhstani" nation, the government attempted to create a new state ideology that can replace the Soviet ideology, and acquired a mechanism to realize this type of nation-building in the proper way, considering the unique inter-ethnic situation of Kazakhstan. One of these mechanisms is the APK. The APK is a central axis of the ethnic policy of Kazakhstan and a developed institution for making civic Kazakhstani identity and national unity. Since its establishment, the APK has continuously experienced changes in its activities. The APK's activities clearly illustrate the direction of Kazakhstan government's nation-building process.

Since independence until 1999, the APK was active mainly in socio-cultural aspects in Kazakhstan, under emphasizing of the process of "Kazakhification" which reflects an ethnic concept more. The APK categorized ethnic groups residing in the Kazakhstan territory and assisted them with financial and spiritual support from the government, so that these ethnic groups could safely settle down in the independent Kazakhstan. By establishing various kinds of national cultural centers and operating regional APKs, the state-level APK carried out activities to revive their own languages and culture.

On the other hand, after the 2000s, it appears that the APK's activities are aimed at formation of "Kazakhstani" nation in earnest with a civic concept. Major examples of these activities are the APK new Regulation passed in 2002 and the Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan approved in 2010. However, while these two bills promote the development of a Kazakhstani nation, they also emphasize the leading role of the Kazakh language in the process, using both civic and ethnic elements. In addition, the establishment and operation of the language center "Tildaryn" undoubtedly indicates the duality of the Kazakhstan government's ethnic policies.

Now that 25 years have passed since Kazakhstan become independent, it is difficult for anyone to assert how the state will develop. Until now, it is quite true that Kazakhstan government has used the APK as a major mechanism for realization of a Kazakhstani nation and its activities seems to product fruitful results.

Through activities of the APK, We could find out that the formation of Kazakhstani nation process shows mixed process. They don't seem to emphasize on pure one direction- Kazakhstani nation which means civic nation. If anything, they are trying to be in the boundary both titular nation- Kazakhs and non-titular nations- other ethnic groups can satisfy. In other words, they could keep stable situations by not passing this boundary after independence. However, they keep trying to use an ethnic concept- Kazakh language in their civic context. As a result, it can be possible that the process of the formation of Kazakhstani nation could be moved closer to ethnic concepts in an appropriate moment. In this respect, they should wield this unique weapon for building a country more wisely with its own perspective and judgment.

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